Unit 15: Front Office Operations

Delivery guidance

In this unit, learners develop knowledge of front office operations, how it is set up and the supervisory roles and requirements needed to make this area a success. Procedures involved in reservations, check in, check out and guest accounting will be investigated, learned and practised. Learners will need to interpret data and room statistics to assess and improve the performance of front office operations within hospitality businesses.

Front office is often described as the communication centre of a hospitality business; the importance of the front office team lies in communicating throughout the organisation to keep the business running efficiently. Learners will understand how the efficient running of front office contributes to maximising revenue and giving excellent customer service throughout the business. Therefore, it is vital to focus not only on the role of front office but also on its purpose.

You are likely to use a range of different teaching, learning and delivery methods in this unit, such as:

- trips and visits – where possible, one of the most effective ways of developing learners' knowledge and understanding of the industry is to visit different types of front office operations in hospitality businesses; use visits to emphasise the integral part front office staff play in the success of a business, and to show that there are great career opportunities available to those who want to progress
- case studies – to illustrate the impacts, both positive and negative, of different types of front office operations, and to offer learners the opportunity to interpret data; emphasise the changing work environment and developing skills and knowledge that take into account the personalisation of service and the need to maximise revenue in an increasingly competitive environment
- individual or group presentations – to explore a range of different hospitality businesses and the planning required to make the front office operations a success
- employer engagement – industry experts from front office operations in hospitality could share their approach to front office and especially customer service; experts could also share examples of planning materials, procedure documents, customer service guidelines and front office data
- work experience – learners could undertake work placements at front office operations and share their experiences with others
- discussions – class and small group discussions on, for example, different customer service scenarios in front office operations and emerging trends for different customer types.

Group work is a useful and acceptable form of delivery and formative assessment, but you must ensure that each learner independently produces their own evidence containing sufficient depth and detail for summative assessment.

Approaching the unit

For learning aim A, first introduce learners to the range, types and standards of front office operations within the hospitality industry. Visits to a range of providers is the most effective way of showing learners what is available, but the internet is also an excellent source of information. Learners could find front office job vacancies, including supervisory roles, for each type of provider so that they begin to understand the purpose of front office operations in hospitality. This will help them develop a keen understanding of a supervisor's role and responsibilities. The final part of this learning aim looks at front office data and how this is used and interpreted for the good of the customer and business. Learners could do this by comparing data from different businesses through research or visits. They could then analyse it in order to make recommendations for improvements.

Learning aims B and C should develop learners' understanding of the importance of front office and why it is often referred to as the communication centre of a business. Introduce the main stages of guests' contact with front office, including reservation, check in, check out and accounting, at an early stage of delivery. This will enable learners to understand the full range of responsibilities of front office staff, and the systems and procedures that need to be in place to enable them to meet these responsibilities. Get your learners to see the challenges that front desk staff face when multitasking and giving excellent customer service with professionalism. A good way of doing this might be to complete an industry visit or to get learners to take part in role-play exercises.

Front office skills can be assessed through role-play or in a real working environment, but learners should learn more than the processes and procedures involved in taking a reservation, meeting and greeting guests and dealing with guest enquiries. Focus on how they communicate with guests, their body language, listening skills and the ability to ask the right questions and say the right things. Practice through role-play or work experience will develop these skills, as will the opportunity to observe good and bad practice.

Assessment model

Learning aim	Key content areas	Recommended assessment approach
A Investigate the structure, requirements and supervision of front office operations	**A1** Front office in hospitality **A2** Supervisor responsibilities and skills in front office operations **A3** Front office data interpretation and use	• A written report reflecting the research into front office operations, data interpretation and a supervisor's responsibility.
B Be able to use systems and procedures involved in guest reservations and check in	**B1** Guest reservation procedure **B2** Guest check-in procedure	• Practical observation of reservations and check in. • Written evidence covering the review of the procedures.
C Be able to use systems and procedures involved in guest check out and accounting	**C1** Guest check out procedure **C2** Front office payments and accounting	• Practical observation of check out and payment accounting. • Written evidence covering the review of the procedures.

Assessment guidance

It is recommended that this unit is internally assessed through a series of assignments. All learners must independently generate evidence that can be authenticated. The recommended assessment for this unit is through three internally assessed assignments.

The recommended assignment for learning aim A is through a written report reflecting the learners' research into front office operations in hospitality across a range of businesses, including the characteristics and the supervision of front office. In order to achieve the assessment and grading criteria, learners will need to select and research different front office operations. Learners could compare data from these examples and present it in chart format. You should ensure the examples selected by learners give sufficient scope to enable them to fully complete the assessment.

The assessment for learning aims B and C could take the form of a role-play situation or it could be assessed in a real working environment, which could be a work experience placement. The assessment should consist of four scenarios:

Learning aim B:

1. guest reservations (learning aim B)
2. guest check in

Learning aim C:

3. guest check out
4. payment accounting.

All of these will require the completion of documentation to a professional standard. This assessment should be videoed where possible and the tutor should complete a record of activity for each individual learner. (This could also be done by the professional witnessing the situation.) Assessors should complete observation records, while people such as work colleagues can complete witness statements. Observation records alone are not sufficient sources of learner evidence; the original learner-generated evidence must support them. For the final review stage, learners should create a written report backed up with evidence to cover the distinction criteria.

You will need to factor in time to assess within the GLH. It is essential that you allow individual learners to select their own examples of front office operations to investigate, as well as the research evidence to include in their work, if they are to show the individual creativity required to achieve the universal distinction criterion.

Getting started

This gives you a starting place for one way of delivering the unit, based on the recommended assessment approach in the specification.

Unit 15: Front Office Operations

Introduction

This is an exciting unit for learners who want to learn more about the customer-facing role of front office operations. Start by asking the learners about their prior knowledge or experience of front office operations. Make it clear that front office operations is the communication centre of many hospitality businesses, explaining that it is where first impressions and last impressions are made. Explain that all functions, activities and areas of front office support the guests' experience, meaning that they are either engaged or disengaged. Introduce the concept of the guest cycle so that your learners can understand that this is where guests make their reservation, register, request information or services, resolve complaints, settle their accounts and check out.

Learning aim A: Investigate the structure, requirements and supervision of front office operations

- Investigate learners' understanding of what 'front office operations' means by asking them to discuss their own experiences with front office staff at various businesses in the hospitality industry. Ask them what their first impressions of the staff were, and get them to identify how this contributed to their overall impression of the business.
- Ask learners to identify the range, standard and types of business where front office staff might work. Show them some websites of these businesses and draw on the learners' views of what types of standards each business might have, such as customer service or price class. Get them to carry out their own research of varying types of businesses and to present their findings to the class as a presentation. As an extension activity, the learners could compare and contrast the findings between two different businesses in a written report.
- Ask your learners to find front office job advertisements for a variety of front office operations. This could be done as a small-group activity where learners find more than one vacancy, or individually where they find a vacancy for a non-supervisory front office role. Ask them to create a poster and present their findings to the class on the role and structure of front office operations, based on the job advertisements they have found.
- Take your learners on a visit to a local business so that they can find out about the different job roles and the services given by front office.
- After the visit, draw an organisational chart for the hotel, but in particular the front office operations, with your learners. Show them at least two different and, if possible, contrasting businesses and ask them to identify in a written report how the businesses may differ and why.
- Review the job roles in front office. Give your learners a list of job titles, each with a short description of the role, and a set of cards with skills and responsibilities printed on them. Ask learners to match the skills and responsibilities to the job roles, explaining why the skills are needed for the role.
- A guest speaker (supervisor or manager in front office operations) could give a talk on a supervisor's role, responsibilities and skills. Prepare the learners before the session to write some questions that they would like to know the answers to, but emphasise questions/content on the role, responsibilities and skills. If this is not possible, use a case study to highlight the roles, responsibilities and skills for a supervisor.

- Lead a whole class discussion reviewing the information gathered from the talk or case study. Research what roles and responsibilities there are and how these are different between businesses. Move the discussion on to the skills needed to match these roles and responsibilities, using an activity worksheet.
- Complete an activity on organisational and management skills, such as creating a staff rota for front office operations.
- Restate that one of the reasons front office is known as the communication centre is because it is the centre of communication for both staff and guests. Give your learners a series of customer scenarios (e.g. a group booking, a walk-in guest with a baby and a small child, a guest who decides not to check out on time, a guest complaining at check out, a last-minute change to a group booking). Ask them to identify what communication skills the staff will need to have with the different departments to ensure the needs of the guests are met. Ask learners how front office staff might communicate this information. Ask learners to document their findings on a poster to compare with the rest of the class.
- Introduce the use and interpretation of data in a front office operation. If you have been on a visit, ask learners to identify what data they have seen used during the visit. Alternatively, ask them to research the use of data in front office operations. Once they have identified forms of data, ask them how these can be used to aid both customers and the businesses in the form of a report.
- Ask learners to consider how work is allocated to the staff. Show them a room forecast and ask what other information the manager of a hotel might need in order to allocate work fairly. Once they have identified the information needed with tutor guidance, get them to complete a staff rota for one week.
- Carry out activities using different types of data, for example room occupancy, for the students to interpret and draw conclusions from. Discuss the activities as a class to share the insights gained.
- Learners could practise an activity for data interpretation. For example, give feedback data from a hospitality business or via a case study and ask learners to write a report on what the data shows. As an extension activity, learners could evaluate the data and make reasonable and justified recommendations on how the businesses could improve.
- Ensure learners are prepared for assessment before giving them the assignment brief.

Learning aim B: Be able to use systems and procedures involved in guest reservations and check in

- Introduce the different stages at which a guest has contact with front office operations. Get learners to identify the stages for themselves and then feedback as a class to create a list on which everyone agrees.
- Ask learners to identify the different activities front office staff undertake at each stage of the guest cycle. Once they have identified the activities, ask them to identify why front office is known as the communication centre of the business and to state its importance to the success of the business.
- Using the above activities, get your learners to identify the key objectives of front office on a poster to feed back to the class. Collate the information and create a class-agreed list of key objectives for front office.
- Discuss the integral role that front office staff have in meeting guests' needs. Ask why guests' needs may vary and review customer segments and the possible needs of each. In small groups,

ask your learners to write some advertising blurb to appeal to guests from one particular market segment.

- Ask your learners to mind map the information front office staff need from a guest, and the information front office staff need to give to the guest, when they make a reservation.
- Once learners have compiled the list, ask them to work in pairs to write a reservation telephone conversation (they could also role-play). Get them to peer assess each other's conservations. Build on the fact that standards vary and information is not always accurate, and get them to identify the problems this might cause.
- Ask your learners to think about how the reservation process can be standardised. Introduce standards of performance; ideally you will have copies from industry to show your learners and to discuss. The learners could now repeat the activity using these standards, and observers could note the differences and give feedback.
- Divide the class into pairs and assign each pair the role of either a staff member or a guest. Get each pair to role-play various guest/staff interactions, for example, welcoming guests into a hotel and describing the facilities. Encourage pairs to swap partners and roles. As an extension, you could use different customer types or ask learners to write observations on each other.
- Demonstrate making reservations and guest check in. Learners should then have the opportunity to practise the procedures, including written requests and dealing with other businesses such as agents. This could also be achieved on a visit to a hotel or through work experience.
- Revise the objectives of front office and ask your learners how this relates to the reservation process. Stress the importance of maximising revenue and ask your learners how they might do this when taking a reservation. Place emphasis on the importance of creating a good impression, upselling, negotiating, getting the booking guaranteed and working accurately. Prepare an exercise whereby learners check a series of bookings for accuracy, and state the appropriate action where mistakes have been made.
- Remind learners of the standards of performance for taking a booking. Ask them to work in pairs to write standards of performance for the check in process. Give them details of a guest and ask them to write and act out a role-play, using their standards, but swapping pairs so that the guest is someone they have not worked with before. Get the guest to feed back their first impressions.
- Ask learners to recap the activities in the occupancy stage of the guest cycle. Prepare an 'in-tray' exercise where learners carry out a series of activities that relate to the occupancy duties of front office. This could include compiling guests' bills, checking bills for accuracy, finding information and passing on information to other departments of the hotel following a guest request.
- Spend some time reviewing customer service skills with your learners. Use visual examples to help them understand the impressions that body language can give and how to read body language signals.
- Explain the importance of using words and tone effectively to convey the right message and attitude. Get them to say phrases using different emotions. Write a list of inappropriate phrases/language often used in customer service situations and discuss how to avoid it – for example, instead of 'You'll have to…', say 'May I suggest that you…'; instead of 'All I have left is our X rooms', say 'Fortunately we still have our X rooms available').
- Set up front desk stations around the room. Have learners take turns in the front office and the guest roles. Practise front office skills, including appropriate documentation and rooming systems for reservations and check in. Each guest should ask questions that are unanticipated, including special requests. Have guests informally 'rate' or give feedback on the level of

professionalism, both customer-facing and the administrative service, given by the front office staff. This presents opportunities to review qualities, attitudes and behaviours necessary to demonstrate professionalism. As an extension task, learners could evaluate their own performance in preparation for the assessment.

- Ensure learners are prepared for assessment before giving them the assignment brief.

Learning aim C: Be able to use systems and procedures involved in guest check out and accounting

- Recap main stages of guest contact and move on to guest checkout and guest accounting.
- Prepare some check out scenarios where guests have had both positive and negative experiences. These could include an incorrect bill, an earlier problem with the stay, the best experience they have ever had or a problem with payment. Get your learners to role-play and then peer assess each other. Ask them to identify the impact of negative experiences at this stage. As an extension, add some guest requests that could come up when checking out; for example, lost keys, guests asking to store items, bill disputes.
- Divide the class into pairs and assign each learner the role of either a staff member or a guest. Get each pair to role-play various guest/staff interactions; for example, check out or payment cards being declined. Remind them that they are part of a bigger team in the hospitality business; how would they get in touch with other departments and what would they say or do? Encourage pairs to swap partners and roles. Complete a worksheet on scenarios that come up in front office, to reinforce learning.
- Demonstrate guest check out and accounting. Learners should then have the opportunity to practise. This could also be achieved on a visit to a hotel or through work experience.
- Deliver a short presentation on basic front office accounting skills and activities, to enhance understanding.
- Ask your learners to identify potential security risks in a hotel and the role of front office in minimising them. Give a series of scenarios where there have been lapses in security and ask your learners to write a report on how they could resolve the situations.
- Set up front desk stations around the room. Have learners take turns in taking the front office and the guest roles. Practise front office skills for check out and guest accounting, with each guest asking questions that are unanticipated, including special requests. Have your learners take turns in taking a supervisor role. Have supervisors informally rate or give feedback on the level of professionalism given by the staff. This presents opportunities to review qualities, attitudes and behaviours necessary to demonstrate professionalism. As an extension task, learners could evaluate their own performance in preparation for the assessment.
- Ensure learners are prepared for assessment before giving them the assignment brief.

Details of links to other BTEC units and qualifications, and to other relevant units/qualifications

This unit links to:

- Unit 5: Cost Control for Hospitality Supervisors
- Unit 14: Luxury Hospitality
- Unit 16: Accommodation Operations
- Unit 21: Technology and Digital Media in Hospitality

Resources

In addition to the resources listed below, publishers are likely to produce Pearson-endorsed textbooks that support this unit of the BTEC International in Hospitality. Check the Pearson website (http://qualifications.pearson.com/endorsed-resources) for more information as titles achieve endorsement.

Textbooks

Baker, S and Huyton, J – *Principles of Hotel Front Office Operations*, 2nd edition (Cengage Learning EMEA, 2001) ISBN 9781844800902.
A guide to front office operations in the hotel industry, with activities throughout to help learners move from an understanding of the basic principles of front office to thinking like a front office employee. Suitable for both tutor and learner.

Bardi, J – *Hotel Front Office Management*, 5th edition (John Wiley & Sons, 2010) ISBN 9780470637524.
An overview of the accommodation sector giving a tour of the front office, a review of the guest cycle, and an analysis of guest services. Higher-level reading; for tutor reference.

Pearson is not responsible for the content of any external internet sites. It is essential for tutors to preview each website before using it in class so as to ensure that the URL is still accurate, relevant and appropriate. We suggest that tutors bookmark useful websites and consider enabling students to access them through the school/college intranet.